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# THE NEW PATH.

PUBLISHED BY THE

Society for the Advancement of  
TRUTH IN ART.

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No. 1.] "Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are,  
and the things that shall be hereafter." [May, 1863.

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THE future of Art in America is not without hope if looked at from certain points of view. The artists are nearly all young men; they are not hampered by too many traditions, and they enjoy the almost inestimable advantage of having no past, no masters and no schools. Add, that they work for an unsophisticated, and, as far as Art is concerned, uneducated public, which, whatever else may stand in the way, will not be prevented by any prejudice or preconceived notions from accepting any really good work which may be set before it. These are solid advantages, hardly possessed in such a degree by any other society, and make a good foundation on which to build well and beautifully for the future. All the omens are favorable, and the voices of the gods speak very plainly; nothing is wanting but that the priests fulfill their office worthily.

If we examine the list of the contributors to this year's Exhibition of the Academy, we shall find it set thick with the names of the young. The old names one by one disappear, and this, not because they represent superannuated, or feeble, or dead men, but because the breath of the new dawn which has already risen on our country blows too freshly and keenly for any but the young in spirit, in hope and courage, to breathe. It would be wanting in grace to speak harshly of men, the memory of whose works is fast disappearing from the minds of the people

as the works themselves are slowly leaving the walls of the Academy. They have done their work, and done it, no doubt, to the extent of their ability; our business is only to bid them "Farewell," while we turn to greet the young Americans who are to inaugurate the new day. It is no disgrace for the elders to have failed. Failure was foreordained. We cannot justly rebuke them, because, after forty years' uninterrupted labor they have given us not a single work which we care to keep, for they have worked under influences hostile to study and to the culture of Art, with no spur from within, and no friendly or sympathizing audience without. Good work has never been produced under such influences.

But for the younger men there is no such plea. The next generation may perhaps see a better time, but this is good enough. The old time was an era of political subsidence and stagnation. Hardly had we outgrown our colonial dependence; new-hatched as we were, many unseemly pieces of the old shells and straws from the nest still stuck to our feathers; the mother-hen, who did not know that she had hatched a swan, but thought us like herself, mere "tame, villatic fowl"—has even yet hardly ceased her admonitory cries and cluckings at our efforts to swim for ourselves, and, indeed, this reproach was fairly brought against us, that our literature and our Art were only copies,

and feeble copies at the best, of European originals. But, within a few years, there has been a great change; a new tide has set in; our independence on Europe has begun to be something more than a name. In literature, in religion, in education, in society, in art—we are fast sweeping into the glad new year when America shall sound the trumpet-call, and marshal her children to do her work in her own free way.

The young men, therefore, have the field to themselves, and they enter upon it untrammelled. They have not to fight the old men—these have quietly given place to the rightful masters of the soil. They cannot complain that the time is dull, and the people thick-witted and slow to learn. They ought to leap with the strength of youth into this unfenced acre and take full possession. It is theirs. Can they do it? Will they do it?

And not only are the men, whose names are beginning to make themselves heard, young men, but they are free from the weight of tradition and the tyranny of masters and schools which hinder and cramp the young artist elsewhere. As far as the people at large are concerned, if we may judge by what we hear and read, and by the pictures that are most eagerly bought, it would not be easy to under estimate their knowledge, or their power to distinguish good from bad. Nor are we prepared to believe that a whole people anywhere or at any time has been thoroughly informed, or instinctively right in its judgments in these matters. Wherever we find an interest in Art, and true perceptions in Art widely diffused through any community we shall discover on examination that it is the result of education, and has been brought about by a few men working, consciously or unconsciously, on true

principles and with earnest zeal. And one reason why the older Art is as great as it unquestionably is, may be found in the fact that it had a regular and uninterrupted growth from the feeblest and rudest beginnings. The thirteenth century men had nothing of man's work behind them to awe them or make them ashamed; they worked their own will in glad unconsciousness of any standard but simple nature. They educated themselves, and their work educated the people, and what is thus true of thirteenth century, is true of the Phidian age in Greece. Now, these conditions of a childish simplicity and ignorance in matters of Art coupled with a strong and wide interest in such matters—albeit, unformed, untrained—and perceptions naturally direct and true, are nowhere to be found to-day as pure as they are in America. In England the public is not only very ignorant, but it is also by nature unsympathetic; cares nothing for pictures or statues, and has no feeling for good Art developed as yet. And of the educated the class that has shown itself able to recognize good work and willing to foster it, is in a very small minority. All the great public works prove this, and the storm of senseless but furious opposition that assails the Pre-Raphaelites—now somewhat subsiding; as, also, the way in which the old school fights the revival of the Gothic. Yet this very example of England ought to be an encouragement to us, when we see what a revolution the Pre-Raphaelites have accomplished and are accomplishing; if so much can be accomplished in England, where tradition and prejudice are in the very air, what may not be done here in our free land by persistent study in the right way, and by slow but steady education of the people. Our artists have only to work faithfully and con-

scientiously, and they will find the public teachable and responsive.

These then are some of the advantages with which the new men take the field. There are others, but we will not dilate upon them now; we rather turn to see what the age has a right to demand at the hands of the artist in return for these advantages. And the first demand she makes is that they shall one and all immediately stop grumbling at the public, and try to find out just how far the neglect, indifference, and, seemingly, deliberate acceptance of poor work that they complain of is their own fault, and how much may be fairly charged to the stupidity and perverseness of the people: our word for it, they will find that there is no one to blame but themselves. Let them look upon their work, in the first place, as something more than a mere means of living. Let them try to get something out of it in the way of enjoyment, love of God's work, a desire to make others sharers in that enjoyment, something, at any rate, beside money. Or, if they will have money, let them try to give the buyers the full worth of their gold, something that shall gather its own interest of pleasure, teaching, culture year by year, as the gold he gets for the canvas or the marble will bear its percentage, and not prove a bargain that having tickled a momentary fancy shall be flung into the garret and forgotten with the whim that prompted its purchase. And this new way of looking at their work, and with the majority of our men no doubt it would be a new way, will speedily bring forth fruit in far better pictures than have ever yet been painted in America; pictures that will give us a right to rejoice in the present and to look forward with hope to the future.

And, again, let these young men

from whom we hope so much, turn their backs deliberately and without ceremony upon the rubbish of the past, and if they doubt their power to discriminate between the rubbish and the good work, let them turn their backs upon the past altogether. There was once a glorious time for art, and immortal men who worked in it, but beside that they lived in another world of ideas, and in a time whose spirit can never, and ought never to return, we have little to learn from them but the general principles on which they worked, and when they have so far influenced us as to lead us to accept those principles as our only guides, they have taught us all that lies in their power; further following of them will only lead to harm. We shall become foreign to our time, affected, incapable of helping others or ourselves; the thirteenth century will have done us all the evil of which we have so long accused the sixteenth.

The new path into which the best minds of the present day summon the young to enter, is the earnest loving study of God's work of nature. This is not only taught to the artist, but to the Writer, the Poet, and the Teacher. It is the moving spirit of the age in which we live; an age greater in all essentials than any that has preceded it, second to none in the purity and strength of its religious ideas; in its love of man, which is the best fruit of its love of God; in its tolerance, its enthusiasm, its energy, and in the widespread diffusion of wealth and education, which are saving it from selfishness and dilettanteism.

A few individuals persuaded of these things have joined themselves together in a Society, for mutual strength, and for the better dissemination of these ideas. They propose to print from month to month a journal in which

they can communicate with others who think with them, or may be led to do so. There is a need of a journal of this sort in which art can be treated with more justice and a broader criticism than it has thus far received at the hands of our public prints. Most of the writing on art which we find in the newspapers is personal, either in what it praises or what it condemns, and is apt to be feebly apologetic if moved to speak with any directness as if artists were made of more fragile clay than other men, and were to be much more daintily handled. We hold to a different view, and believe that to be a good, not to say a great artist, a man needs such powers of brain and heart as are quite inconsistent with irritability or unwillingness to hear the words of frank and generous criticism. While we mean that in these pages what we believe to be the truth shall be spoken without fear and without favor, we also aim to criticize on far

higher than personal grounds, and to apply the same tests to works of painting and sculpture that all men are agreed in applying to written works of imagination and fancy.

In conclusion; it may seem that we have given expression to very high and enthusiastic hopes, which are built on very slight grounds of actual performance. There is truth in the criticism, for we cannot point to the works of any one man in proof of the revolution which we predict. But our faith is built on signs which are none the less infallible because they are as yet rather felt than seen. We believe, in short, that at length some new principles in art, few but potent, have been discovered and accepted, and that these principles, taking hold of the younger men, and gradually improving their lives and shaping their work, will in time produce pictures, statues, and buildings worthy of the age and country in which we live.

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### OUR "ARTICLES" EXAMINED.

*An Essay Read before the Association, at the Regular Meeting, Tuesday, March 17th, 1863.*

BY RUSSELL STURGIS, JR.

MR. PRESIDENT, AND GENTLEMEN OF  
THE ASSOCIATION,

We have agreed upon and signed certain Articles of organization, expressing our convictions and our wishes in regard to Art. We signed them, it is safe to say with a full sense that we were committing ourselves, positively, to declarations which we must be prepared to positively maintain. We are, it seems, substantially in accord, as regards the great principles which should govern the Arts. We are in accord as regards the principles that are to govern our future action. The declarations of our First Article are to be considered as no longer debatable among us, they are to be expounded to inquirers, defended against assailants, and consulted as the basis of future inquiry and discussion.

It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that we should each and all examine closely into the exact meaning of every sentence of our confession of faith; that we may ascertain if we do indeed all mean the same thing, as well as use the same words. It is the nature of men, or at least a second nature, to disagree, and to waste much independence in trite assertions of the right of every man to his own opinion. Moreover it is fashionable to look not too sharply at what words mean, and to accept a statement made in *these* words which is positively rejected if made in *those*.

Perhaps we have reformed this indifferently with us, for we profess to be radical thinkers, and those are not hastily formed opinions which are set forth in our First Article. But, in